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ABSTRACT

In 2002, the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) began a new phase, with the goal of developing a team of community college and tribal college faculty, extension educators, and civic leaders to address the long-term needs of rural America. An advisory council was established to select the RCCI pilot states and colleges, monitor the effectiveness of RCCI activities, and establish trust between community/tribal colleges and land grant universities. Fourteen teams of community and tribal colleges in six states were chosen for inclusion in the RCCI program. Nineteen extension educators were selected to coach RCCI teams in their areas. Teams benefited from the extension educators' network of contacts, technical assistance, and support. An institute was held to familiarize new members with the program and to present strategies for achieving equitable economic development, expanded educational access, and broadened engagement of citizens in local issues. A research team of land grant faculty was established to monitor RCCI progress. A series of training programs and a website are being developed to assist team members, and funds were allocated to the teams for securing technical assistance. An electronic newsletter was prepared to alert the teams to grant opportunities. A new professional organization, the Rural Community College Alliance, was formed to reduce rural isolation and share effective solutions to rural problems. The new group held its first conference in October, 2002. (TD)

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RCCI

# Year One Report

## RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE INITIATIVE

## Building New Partnerships in Support of America's Rural Communities

A Ford Foundation Supported Initiative

Report Submitted by
North Central Regional Center for Rural Development
Southern Rural Development Center

RC 024 146

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RCCI
Our Goal:
The development of a team of community college faculty, Extension educators and the broad-based civic leaders working in partnership to address the long-term needs of people and places in rural America.

**Introduction**

In the summer of 2002, two regional rural development centers (RRDCs) — the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD) and the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) — began an ambitious project. With funding from the Ford Foundation, the Centers initiated an effort to expand the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) program, both in the number of participating colleges and in the number of partners working to address the needs of Rural America. This new approach to RCCI was intended to demonstrate that this partnership model could become an ongoing part of the resources available to support the community building efforts of distressed rural areas. During year one, the project partners worked to strengthen the capacity of rural community colleges and land-grant Extension personnel to serve as catalysts in advancing the community and economic development agenda of rural places located within their common service areas.

While challenging, this new phase of the RCCI program is indeed rewarding. The needs and opportunities of rural America are diverse and systemic. The cultures and structures of our educational institutions are well embedded. Yet, the driving need to do more with fewer resources makes this project attractive to all participants. After year one, we can already begin to identify ways in which the Initiative is helping community and tribal colleges to access the resources and tools available from land-grant institutions. At the same time, land-grant educators are gaining a better understanding of the key issues facing rural places via their contacts with RCCI teams. The enhanced level of interaction between these two entities is strengthening the level of social capital upon which new strategies for sustainable development can be built. Furthermore, the introduction of coaching as a tool for facilitating community capacity building may be important for Extension educators as they seek to assist communities in applying promising strategies to address priority concerns with their community. The following outlines the series of activities the NCRCRD and SRDC successfully initiated between July 1, 2002, and June 30, 2003.

## RCCI Advisory Council

**Ladonna Brave Bull Allard**
THPO Cultural Resource Planner, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe

**Sharon Anderson**
Director, North Dakota State University Extension Service

**Clyde Chesney**
Administrator, Tennessee State University Cooperative Extension Program

**Jim Christenson**
Associate Dean and Director, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Service

**David Dodson**
President, MDC, Inc.

**David E. Foster**
Associate Director, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

**Beverlee Nance**
Vice President for Continuing Education & Economic Development, Southeastern Community College

**Carlyle Ramsey**
President, Danville Community College

**Joe Sertich**
President, Northeast Higher Education District

**Ismael Sosa**
President, Southwest Texas Junior College

**Cheryl Sparks**
President, Howard College





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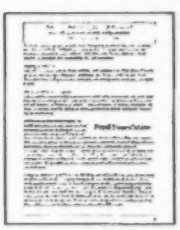
**Forming the RCCI Advisory Council: A Key Step in Partnership Building**

A critical first step in helping build a successful RCCI effort is to ensure that key parties are at the table working together to help guide the development and evolution of the newest phase of the RCCI program. As such, an 11 person Advisory Council was established in the very early stages of the Initiative. The committee includes: four council representatives, selected from previous RCCI schools that are now engaged in the Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA) professional association; four Extension administrators from land-grant universities across the United States; one representative from MDC, Inc., the original coordinator of the RCCI program; and two community/tribal college presidents, representing the new slate of RCCI institutions.

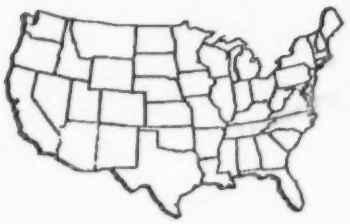
The central role of the Advisory Council is to select the RCCI pilot states and colleges. Additionally, the Council works closely with the two RRDCs to monitor the effectiveness of the various activities that are part of the RCCI effort. The Council's efforts are instrumental in establishing a stronger level of trust between community/tribal colleges and land-grant university leaders. As this trust solidifies, there is every hope that coordination between the two educational entities will become more commonplace, particularly with regard to activities designed to advance the social, educational and economic advancement of rural people and communities in their states.



**Nomination and Selection of New RCCI Colleges: A Democratic Process**

The RCCI Advisory Council endorsed the effort by the RRDCs to pursue an open process of creating a pool of rural community and tribal college candidates for inclusion in the new RCCI program. The first step involved a candid discussion within the RCCI Advisory Council regarding the states that would be best positioned to participate in RCCI in relation to the Initiative's focus on partnership building between community/tribal colleges and land-grant universities. Six states were selected on the basis of having a strong community college or tribal system in place, a strong land-grant university capacity in the area of community and rural development, and receptivity to partnership building between these two higher education entities. The six states selected were Minnesota, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota and Texas.

Once the states were chosen, the RRDCs prepared a nomination form and cover letter and distributed these to all known rural community and tribal colleges in the six states. Institutions were



encouraged to nominate themselves or other colleges that they felt would embrace the goals and philosophy of RCCI. By the deadline date, 29 community and tribal colleges had been nominated. Then, the RRDCs forwarded formal applications to the nominated schools. Eighteen completed applications were submitted, and these applications were subsequently reviewed by the Advisory Council. In the end, 16 were chosen, including one community college district that includes five community colleges. Three schools from western North Carolina joined together to form a single team. This meant that 14 RCCI teams were established for the newest phase of the program. Personal site visits were made with each team within six weeks of their selection. These visits provided an excellent opportunity for teams to become further acquainted with the RRDCs as well as to discuss expectations and hopes from both parties regarding the involvement of the teams in this important initiative in the months ahead.

## RCCI Schools

**Minnesota**
- Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College
- Northeast Higher Education District
- Rochester Community & Technical College

**Mississippi**
- East Central Community College

**New Mexico**
- Eastern New Mexico University-Roswell
- Eastern New Mexico University-Ruidoso
- Mesalands Community College

**North Carolina**
- Carteret Community College
- Piedmont Community College
- Western Carolina Partnership
  - Haywood Community College
  - Southwestern Community College
  - Tri-County Community College

**North Dakota**
- United Tribes Technical College
- Williston State College

**Texas**
- Howard College
- Coastal Bend College



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# RCCI Coaches

**Minnesota**
Deanna Himango, University of Minnesota
Bruce Schwartau, University of Minnesota
Elizabeth Templin, University of Minnesota

**Mississippi**
Carolyn Lott, Mississippi State University
Chance McDavid, Mississippi State University

**New Mexico**
Eduardo Arellano, New Mexico State University
Ramon Dominguez, New Mexico State University
Mary Prentice, New Mexico State University

**North Carolina**
Doug Clement, North Carolina State University
Harvey Fouts, North Carolina State University
Ed Jones, North Carolina State University
John O'Sullivan, North Carolina A&T State University
Robin Roper, North Carolina State University

**North Dakota**
Linda Hauge, North Dakota State University
Barbara Schmitt, United Tribes Technical College
Kathleen Tweeten, North Dakota State University

**Texas**
Fela Leal, Texas A&M University
Brenda Rue, Texas A&M University
Gene Theodori, Texas A&M University

**Enhancing RCCI Team Performance: Building Coaching Capacity among Land-Grant Educators**

One of the wrinkles in this new program involved the recruitment and training of "coaches" within the land-grant universities located in the six pilot states. Through the efforts of the RRDCs, a total of 19 Extension educators were selected to serve as coaches. With major coordination provided by Mary Emery, NCRCRD, and significant assistance by MDC, Inc. provided by Carol Lincoln and Ken Hubbell, a coaches training was held February 2003 in Excelsior Springs, MO. The workshop introduced participants to the essential elements of coaching, including the role that they as coaches would play in the RCCI program. One of the major by-products of this training is that a useful set of educational curricula on coaching was developed for use in the RCCI program. This will serve as a valuable tool for any future training that the RRDCs will sponsor.

Once the training was completed, the coaches were assigned to RCCI teams located within close geographic proximity. As a result of this training, coaches have been meeting with their teams on a regular basis. RCCI teams have benefited from land-grant university educators serving in the coaching role in at least three ways:

- **Networking.** Since the Extension educators typically work in the same geographic area that the RCCI schools are located, they have a strong network of contacts that can be mobilized to lend assistance to the RCCI teams;
- **Technical Assistance.** With their links to the land-grant university system and the RRDCs, the coaches can secure technical assistance from faculty who can offer the teams valuable information on issues of interest to them; and
- **Support.** The coaching support provided by the land-grant educators is likely to persist long after funding for the RCCI program is terminated, since their outreach efforts are a key part of what these individuals do on a routine basis in their rural development work.

**The RCCI Institute: The Successful Launching Ground for the New RCCI Teams**

Since the inception of RCCI in the mid-1990s, the opportunity for teams to meet under the formal banner of an RCCI Institute has been a valuable part of the experience. This important element of the RCCI success story has been preserved in the new phase of the effort. With over 100 persons in attendance, the 2003 RCCI Institute was hosted by the RRDCs in March 2003 in Excelsior Springs, MO. With major assistance and guidance provided by MDC, Inc., the Institute offered new core team members the opportunity to learn more about the history of the RCCI program, its key principles and goals, and the successes that past colleges have realized as a result of their involvement in this program. Team members were also introduced to the Vision to

**Highlights of Coaching Curriculum**

- The Role of Coaching in the New Phase of RCCI
  - Four Steps Breakthrough Technique
  - New Phase Coaching Diagram
  - Job Description
  - RCCI Coaching Lessons
- Strategies for Creating and Nurturing Electronic Communities of Practice
- Monthly Coaching Report
- Reflective Journaling
  - Orientation: Journaling Assignment
  - Pre-training: Journaling Assignment
  - Coaches' Retreat: Journaling Assignment 1
  - Coaches' Retreat: Journaling Assignment 2





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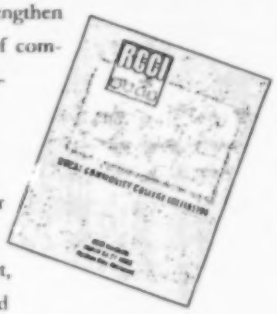
Action process, a key approach for engaging college and community members in a joint effort to strengthen the community development work of community and tribal colleges in the geographic areas that they serve.



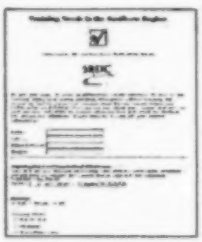

RCCI teams will be challenged to address three critical subjects in their communities in the coming months:

- equitable economic development,
- expanded educational access, and
- broadened engagement of citizens in local issues.

The Institute provided RCCI teams the opportunity to attend a series of concurrent sessions that outlined various strategies to consider as they address these three issue areas. A major benefit of the 2003 Institute is that it provided an environment for the various teams to interact and learn from one another, allowing them to expand their contacts with current and past RCCI schools and to build camaraderie among the new group of teams.

**Establishing Research Capacity: A Framework for Assessing Impacts**

A strong history of involvement in applied social science research has enabled the RRDCs have to take steps to begin designing and implementing a research strategy to assess the impact of the RCCI program on those schools that are participating. This has been initiated by establishing a research team of land-grant faculty interested in monitoring the progress and success of the RCCI program. For example, efforts are being made to assess the current capability of the places that the RCCI teams will be targeting as part of their work. Over time, a key task of the RRDC research team will be examining the nature and extent of improvements occurring in the targeted communities resulting from the efforts of the RCCI teams. Special attention will be given to measuring the level of progress made in pursuing equitable economic development, to the expansion in the access among low wealth residents to the colleges' educational resources, and to the enhancement in the number of people engaged in community improvement activities in the targeted sites.

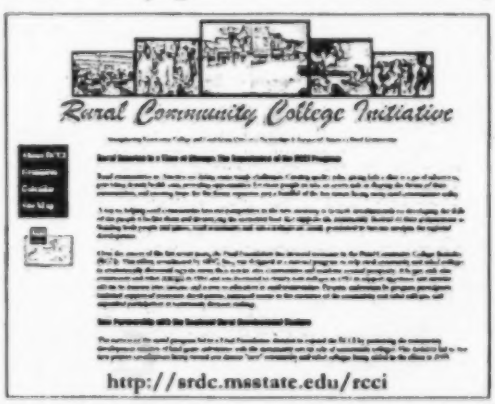


**Strengthening Rural Development Capacity: RCCI Training Opportunities**

As RCCI teams begin to take a more active role in guiding the long-term viability of their rural communities, they will need access to quality training programs that are designed to expand their knowledge, understanding and application of community and economic development strategies. The RRDCs are developing a series of training programs that will be available to RCCI team members in the coming months. Proposed training programs include such topics as community leadership development, rural entrepreneurship, business skills, e-commerce, business retention and expansion, and public issues deliberations. RCCI team members are being invited to complete an electronic survey that will provide the RRDCs with information on the training programs that they view as highest priority for the coming year (September 2003–July 2004).

**Building RCCI Links through Technology**

In this age of technology, the RRDCs have embraced this innovation as a valuable tool for maintaining communication with various entities that are playing a vital role in the RCCI program. A new RCCI website is near completion and will be launched to support the work of the teams. The website provides a centralized source of information on each college, the team members, the names of land-grant Extension educators serving as coaches for the teams, the membership of the Advisory Council, and the partner organizations that are playing a valuable role supporting the RCCI effort (i.e., the Ford Foundation, MDC, Inc., and the two RRDCs). The RCCI website also provides links to a variety of resources that can be accessed by RCCI teams to support their community building activities. Special efforts are being made to outline the variety of resources that are available by the three major areas of work being addressed by the RCCI teams (economic development, education and access, civic engagement).




To facilitate easy communication, a variety of e-mail listservs have been established by the RRDCs. These electronic lists are designed to facilitate interaction among all RCCI teams, as well as among subsets of the teams such as community college presidents, team leaders or coaches. Furthermore, to facilitate the preparation of monthly reports by coaches, the RRDCs have created an electronic reporting system that can be easily completed and submitted to the RRDCs via the RCCI website.

Finally, the RRDCs have begun hosting monthly teleconferences with RCCI presidents, team leaders and coaches as a way to monitor the progress of each team, to address in a timely fashion the variety of challenges that may have cropped up, and to share ideas on how to move the RCCI team effort forward.



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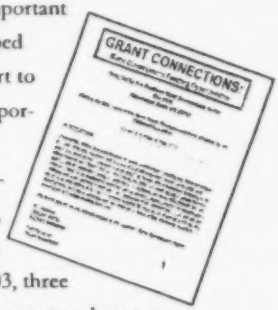
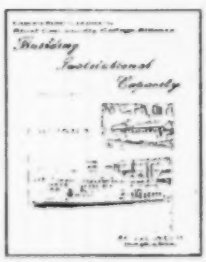
**RRDCs Serving as Conduits for Accessing Technical Assistance**

New RCCI community college teams have ready access to technical assistance that can help teams tackle key activities they are seeking to address. Each team has been allocated funds to support the cost of securing technical assistance from past RCCI college members, land-grant university faculty or other relevant individuals or organizations. The RRDCs are now coordinating requests from RCCI teams to secure technical assistance. The RRDCs are actively developing a web-based technical assistance information pool that will highlight the type of expertise that can be tapped via the RRDCs' network of land-grant contacts or links to current and past RCCI colleges.

**Capturing Resources to Support RCCI Team Efforts: Identifying Grant Opportunities**

The strategic blueprint that RCCI teams are now developing as part of their Vision to Action activities will showcase the major challenges and opportunities that await the RCCI teams and their community partners in the upcoming months. While local resources may be in place to tackle these issues, the likelihood is that some funds to address these important issues will need to be creatively tapped from extramural sources. In an effort to alert the RCCI teams to funding opportunities, the RRDCs – through the SRDC – are preparing and distributing an electronic newsletter entitled, "Grant Connections," to new RCCI colleges. Since the beginning of 2003, three newsletters showcasing over a dozen grants relevant to the work of the RCCI have been shared with the teams.

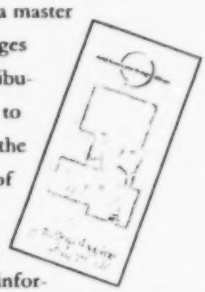


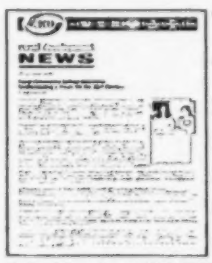



**The Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA) Conference: RRDCs Working behind the Scenes**

The Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA) is a network and advocacy group that helps build the capacity of member community colleges to improve the educational and economic prospects for rural America. The Alliance seeks to reduce rural isolation and share effective solutions to problems facing distressed rural communities. The formation of this new professional organization was recently spearheaded by many of the community and tribal colleges that were part of the RCCI program over the 1994-2002 period.

Given the fact that RCCA is a relatively young organization, the RRDCs worked hand in hand with RCCA in managing its premiere meeting held in Memphis, TN, in October 2002. The RRDCs provided technical assistance to the RCCA Planning Committee and managed the major logistics associated with the conference. This included the preparation of a "Save the Date" postcard, the development of the "call for papers" announcement, the compilation and development of a master electronic list of community and tribal colleges across the United States, the electronic distribution of the "call for papers" announcement to the large list of schools, the preparation of the conference program, and the development of an RCCA conference website containing all the vital information on the annual meeting (i.e., registration form, meeting costs, hotel information) as well as the conference proceedings. Furthermore, the RRDCs managed all the financial aspects associated with the conference and ensured that all the meeting rooms had the requisite audio and video equipment needed to facilitate presentations. Over 150 individuals attended the inaugural meeting of RCCA, and conference evaluations completed by those in attendance offered clear evidence that the meeting was an overwhelming success. The RRDCs are now working closely with the RCCA Planning Committee for the conference which will be held October 6-8, 2003, in San Antonio, TX.






**Telling the RCCI Story**

The RCCI offers others a wonderful example of collaboration and place-based community economic development. To share that story, the RRDCs have published several articles on the program in their own newsletters. *Rural Development News*, published by the NCRCRD, featured the Initiative in Volume 26, Number 1 in 2002 and again in Volume 26, Number 3 in 2003. Both issues are available on the web. The SRDC publicized its involvement with the Initiative in its Volume 6, Number 2 issue of *Southern Perspectives* in the winter of 2003 and in its 2002-2003 annual report. These publications are also available on the Center's website.

In addition, *The Rural Sociologist*, Volume 23, Number 2, has published a short article on the project, highlighting the new partnership with the community and tribal colleges and the land-grant universities. Finally, the project staff are sharing what they have learned about coaching as a tool for community economic





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development at the Rural Sociological Society annual meeting through a poster session, July 27-30.

### In Summary

The newest phase of RCCI has made important progress in establishing a stronger working partnership between rural community and tribal colleges and land-grant universities in the United States. In the months ahead, the RRDCs will continue to devote their energies to solidify and sustain the links between these two higher education entities. The RRDCs are appreciative of the
important investment by the Ford Foundation to help move this partnership forward. In time, the true winners of this partnership will be the people and communities of rural America who will have access to a coordinated response by community and tribal colleges and land-grant universities in addressing their high priority development challenges.

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